DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 374 932 RC 019 769

AUTHOR Danaher, P. A.
TITLE Conceptualising Itinerancy: Lessons from an Educational Program Designed for the Children of the Showmen's Guild of Australasia.
PUB DATE 21 Aug 93
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Symposium of the Postgraduate Student Association (Rockhampton, Queensland, Australia, August 21, 1993). Printed on colored paper.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Childhood Attitudes; Distance Education; *Educational Experience; Educational Opportunities; Elementary Education; Foreign Countries; *Life Style; *Migrant Children; Migrant Education; Migrants; *Place of Residence; Semantics; Stereotypes
IDENTIFIERS *Sense of Place; *Showmens Guild (Australasia)

ABSTRACT

This paper examines itinerancy, particularly educational itinerancy, and the appropriateness of various labels applied to the life style of members of the Showmen's Guild of Australasia. Guild members and their families travel from town to town providing agricultural and equestrian shows. An ongoing study is examining the effectiveness of a distance education program established in 1989 for show children. Researchers interviewed children, parents, and home tutors about curriculum, participant roles, social networks, and work and play. It was found that most respondents referred to Guild members' caravans (i.e. house trailers) as their "homes," and children talked about coming "home" from school to their caravans. On the other hand, most responses to the question, "Where is home for you?", referred to a particular town, rather than to "my caravan." Some blurring of the home/school distinction was also revealed, in that school work (rather than homework) was described as being completed both at the local schools and in the caravans. These varying responses indicate the wide range of experience and understandings that make up the particular form of itinerancy in which show people engage. Additionally, the lifestyle of show members cannot be stereotyped as nomadic, as their lives have definite frontiers and boundaries and some show people are very successful in material terms. This paper concludes that an attempt to characterize educational itinerancy as conforming rigidly to a single and simplistic conceptualization fails to gain credence. Instead, itinerancy emerges as a multilayered, contextualized, and negotiated phenomenon. (LP)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 374 932

CONCEPTUALISING ITINERANCY: LESSONS FROM AN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM DESIGNED FOR THE CHILDREN OF THE SHOWMEN'S GUILD OF AUSTRALASIA

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Peter Hallinan
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

P. A. Danaher
BEd (James Cook), BA (Qld) (Hons) (Deakin),
MLitt (NE), GradDipTertiaryEd (NE)
Postgraduate Student
Faculty of Education
University of Central Queensland
Rockhampton 4702

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Paper presented at the annual postgraduate symposium of the Postgraduate Student Association, University of Central Queensland, Rockhampton, 21 August 1993.

RC 019769

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CONCEPTUALISING ITINERANCY: LESSONS FROM AN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM DESIGNED FOR THE CHILDREN OF THE SHOWMEN'S GUILD OF AUSTRALASIA

P. A. Danaher
Postgraduate Student
Faculty of Education
University of Central Queensland
Rockhampton 4702

This paper deals with a specific aspect of continuing research by a group of staff members in the Faculty of Education at the University of Central Queensland into the educational experiences of children of the Showmen's Guild of Australasia. This aspect is concerned with issues in conceptualising the lives of the Showmen's Guild families. In particular, the paper considers whether terms such as "itinerant", "mobile", "transient", and "nomadic" can appropriately be applied to these families, or whether some alternative descriptor is needed to encapsulate their distinctive lifestyles.

In 1992 and 1993 a number of semi-structured interviews have been conducted with children, parents, home tutors, and teachers involved in a program established by the Queensland School of Distance Education. The researchers have used techniques of grounded theory within an interpretive theoretical paradigm, in order to record the participants' perceptions of the educational needs and opportunities of the Showmen's Guild children.

The paper presents the main findings of the study to date, then recasts them in terms of conceptualising itinerancy. The strengths and limitations of the itinerant stereotype in aiding understanding of the Showmen's Guild are addressed. Finally, a tentative statement is developed about the lifestyles of Guild members. In the process, a corollary statement about the relationship between schooling and other elements of those lifestyles is put forward.

CONCEPTUALISING ITINERANCY: LESSONS FROM AN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM DESIGNED FOR THE CHILDREN OF THE SHOWMEN'S GUILD OF AUSTRALASIA[1]

INTRODUCTION

When strangers meet, one question that they ask each other is likely to be "Where do you live?" - or possibly its variant, "Where do you come from?" (Winning, 1990, p. 246). Ascertaining the location of the new acquaintance, with its presumption of a fixed residence by which she or he can be classified and fitted into some pre-existing community framework, is a pervasive and effective mechanism for regulating social relations. Permanent residence is also a means for constructing one incarnation of "the other" - the shiftless wanderer whose address at "no fixed abode" renders her or him at best unreliable and improvident, and at worst likely to be found in a court of law on some kind of property charge.[2]

---

[1]I am thankful to my colleagues and mentors in the Faculty of Education at the University of Central Queensland for their diverse contributions to and interests in the project on which this paper reports. Their companionship has shown me that this kind of collaborative research is a boon rather than a bane. My supervisor, Professor Leo Bartlett, has provided sound advice on incorporating into my doctoral research what was initially an unrelated study. The willing co-operation of members of the Showmen's Guild of Australasia and staff members from the Queensland School of Distance Education is also gratefully acknowledged. Interviews were transcribed by Mr Geoffrey Danaher, Ms Bonita Frank, and Ms Pam Gale. The project was funded by a University of Central Queensland Research Grant (ER/U/399). I accept responsibility for the views expressed in the paper.

[2]The stereotype of the gipsy encapsulates much of the ambivalence of this attitude. An extreme version of this stereotype is the myth of Ahasverus, the Wandering Jew, whereby the charge of lacking a fixed home is a key ingredient of particular forms of antisemitism. See Rose (1990, chap. 2) and Rose (1992, 37-

Yet the "reliable resident/feckless itinerant" dichotomy on which this manifestation of "the other" is based is highly problematic. In particular, the equation between spending a large part of each year travelling from one place to another and limited educational opportunities is not sustainable, at least in reference to the Showmen's Guild of Australasia. A small group of Guild members have emerged as a well organised and articulate lobby group, whose concerted actions led to the establishment of an educational program designed specifically to address the perceived needs of their children.

This paper seeks to problematise the notion of itinerancy, especially educational itinerancy, by detailed reference to an on-going research project into the educational program created for the Showmen's Guild children by the Queensland School of Distance Education in Brisbane. The paper refers in turn to relevant background information about the program and the research project investigating it; selected findings from the 1992 and 1993 stages of the project; the adequacies of the itinerant stereotype for interpreting these findings; and implications for the lifestyles, including the contribution of schooling, of Guild members.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

There are a number of "runs" or circuits throughout Australia connected by the annual agricultural shows. In addition to the local committees, there are various groups involved in organising these shows. These groups include members of the Showmen's Guild ("the showies"), "the itinerants", "the horsy people", and "the workers". Although distinctions among groups are clear to show people, interaction is strong and membership sometimes

---

39).

overlaps. Previously members had to be born into the Guild; now people can apply for election if they have completed at least three years working on local shows. The extent to which this has resulted in the introduction of large amounts of "new blood" remains to be established.[3]

In 1989, largely in response to active lobbying by members of the Guild, the Queensland Department of Education established a program for children connected with the show circuit. Teachers from the Brisbane campus of the Queensland School of Distance Education oversee the children's completion of correspondence lessons, which are supplemented by various technological aids. The teachers travel to several shows in Queensland, and work directly with the children in local schools. Some parents employ home tutors to work with their children when the teachers return to Brisbane.

The research project examining aspects of this unique learning situation is being conducted by staff members from the Faculty of Education at the University of Central Queensland. Working largely within an interpretive paradigm and using a qualitative orientation, the researchers are following the grounded theory methodology propounded by Glaser and Strauss (1967). The pilot study, carried out in July 1992 at the Mackay show, involved five researchers conducting general, semi-structured interviews with sixteen children, seven parents, and three home tutors. In June 1993, seven researchers attended the Bundaberg show and completed semi-structured interviews, focussing on curriculum,

[3]This paper, like the research project to date, is concerned with members of the Showmen's Guild. It is accepted that different conceptions of itinerancy might apply to other groups connected with the show circuit. However, the researchers have yet to resolve the methodological difficulties of establishing contact and rapport with members of these groups.

participant roles, social networks, and work and play, with twenty-eight children, sixteen parents, five home tutors, and eight teachers.

The presentations reporting this research have concentrated on several specific elements of the lives of participants in the Queensland show circuit. These elements include the background to the program (Wyer, Danaher, Woodrow, Kindt, Hallinan, Moran, Rose, Purnell, Duncum, & Thompson, 1992); links among social networks, itinerant education, and program evaluation (Danaher, Rose, & Hallinan, 1993); relationships between parents and teachers, children and teachers, and parents and children (Thompson, Wyer, Kindt, & Danaher, 1993; Wyer, Thompson, Kindt, & Danaher, 1993); work and play (Rose, 1993); recreation and the construction of meaning (Rose, Wyer, & Danaher, 1993); connections between language and power (Danaher, 1993); and the constitution of a disadvantaged group (Rose, Moriarty, & Danaher, 1993).

SELECTED FINDINGS

This section of the paper presents the results of an examination of the interview transcripts resulting from the 1992 and 1993 stages of the research. The various ways in which respondents referred to "home" were interrogated, with a view to elaborating a diversity of opinions held about residence and itinerancy by people connected in different ways with the show circuit.

Many children, parents, home tutors, and teachers referred easily to the Guild members' caravans as their "homes". A twelve year old girl explained how she helped her parents to sell food bags from a canteen at the show: "I do about an hour a day when I come home

from school, working in there". A seven year old boy commented, "I've got a big stack of books that I like at home". A preschooler said, "What I do is things at home - school work". A mother stated, "My children come home from school, they're allowed to go and play", and she was pleased that "the kids come home bouncing and happy...". She added:

> For me, what I do, I take works with the children at home, when we get to Victoria, and that works for me again...I work in the home doing book work or whatever I have to do...

Another mother explained how she taught her daughter to read:

> I tried as hard as I could to make everything familiar for her. So we did a lot of work at home. And she actually learnt to read and write travelling from school to school".

Another parent said explicitly, "Because your caravan is home...". One mother referred to the close contact between at least one School of Distance Education teacher and show children and their families: "And she's been in our homes, like years ago they never did". A home tutor, describing her work with the child of her employer, referred to "[t]he things I can't provide for him at home". One of the School of Distance Education teachers said that, when his colleagues and he worked with the show children at local schools, "We often look at a project for the week...so we can finish the documents at the end of the week that they take home...".

Show children made varying responses to the question "Where is home?". An eleven year old boy answered, "Probably where I'm like living now. Dayborough". A ten year old girl, after identifying "home" as Bangholme in suburban Melbourne, added, "Every time we come home..., we go there for about four weeks after every set of runs we do". Many of the nuances in discussions of "home" were encapsulated in the following exchange with a ten year old boy:

> I. But if I said to you, "Where is home to you?", what would you say?
> J. Brisbane.
> I. Brisbane. You've got a house in Brisbane?
> J. Oh, it's not really mine, it's my aunty's, but we usually live there.

A similarly aged girl reported a variation on this residential situation:

> ...we have a house in Brisbane, and my nanna, sometimes, because she's getting too old now, so she just stays at home, and she tries to help me in school work, so I stay home with her most of the times.

A ten year old girl identified home as being "in Queensland". One boy provided a novel response when asked what he said if someone questioned him about where he lived:

> We just say we're new in the town if we go shopping somewhere, because people sort of nag us saying, "Will you give us a free ticket?" and all.

Adults connected with the show circuit also responded to the question "Where is home?". One parent replied, "Here. Here this week. We just travel all year round". Another parent said, "Yes. Sort of. Off and on" in answer to the question, "So is Melbourne home to you?". A home tutor stated, "Most of the time we are on the road...[A home town is] Only at the Gold Coast".

Several comments illustrated an overlapping of where and what "home" was for show people. A father indicated about his youngest daughter: "...we left her at home, we were lucky enough to stay at home with my mother-in-law and father-in-law, but she went to school locally up until Easter". A thirteen year old boy said, "After this run we just go home for awhile". A mother, who wanted her son, once he was of high school age, to attend an independent school close to where her sister and brother-in law lived, explained, "I think it's more family, because they're there and if he's boarding he can go home for the weekends".

Some respondents commented on the relative benefits of completing school work "at home" and in the local schools. One boy explained:

> It's better at home for one reason, because there's not as many people so it doesn't take as long. So you start about 9.30 and finish at about one o'clock. But at school you meet different people and make friends. So I like them about the same really.

A seven year old boy commented, "...when you're doing it at home you can hardly get anything done...there's a lot of noise and all that. But at school there's not". A ten year old girl demurred: "Sometimes it's better to go home because you can get more done sometimes than at school". A mother said that, although "...we've got a very mobile home which is quite lovely, with everything that opens and shuts, and that's not a problem", difficulties arose when she tried to supervise her daughter's correspondence lessons while her husband and his friends wanted to use the same space for socialising. She said, "It all goes together" in response to the interviewer's suggestion, "So it's home being school room as well". Another mother referred to her son "working in a sort of classroom atmosphere at home". Another parent believed that a separate caravan, as a dedicated space for show children to complete their lessons when not attending local schools, would serve a purpose: "Not like the home van that you're in there and your husband's coming and getting spare parts out of...".

Certain other references to "home" by participants in the show circuit were revealing. When asked where he did most of his school work, a seven year old boy responded, "Sometimes we do it at home, but we really do it at proper school". One parent expressed a sense of the caravan being a temporary home, albeit for a number of years, before a "proper" home could be established. When questioned how she answered people who ask her "Where's home?", she replied:

> I say that we spend a lot of time at the Gold Coast and that we travel twelve months of the year, and one day we'll have our own home base. But at this stage we are still putting our business together and once we're established there, the next step is a home.

She acknowledged that this goal could take several years to attain: "That's why we make our homes here as elaborate and with whatever you can think of that spins and turns or whatever". Yet in the same interview she explained that she had previously opposed sending her son away to boarding school, "as in leave our business and our home and his father".

THE ITINERANT STEREOTYPE AND THE INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

At this point, it is helpful to consider a recent description of the essential characteristics of the nomad:

> Nomads belong to different cultures. They come from different periods of history. From different time periods, they constantly incorporate and evolve a unique variation of spiritual, artistic, and cultural expression. There are as many different lifestyles and aesthetic norms in the nomadic form of social organisation as there are cultures and peoples in the world. Nomads are known to be rooted in myth, legend, and folklore...
> The impact of their art and their way of life has two important aspects:
> 1. The fundamental idea that all life, experience, and existence is without frontiers or boundaries.
> 2. The foundational idea of not glorifying fulfilment in terms of territory or resources. (Gabriel, 1990, p. 396)

The question here relates less to the appropriateness of this conceptualisation than to its utility in interpreting the findings presented in the previous section. The two "fundamental" and "foundational" ideas can be shown to be inapplicable. Show people's lives have definite frontiers and boundaries. The circuits are highly organised events, with

the equivalent of a small town moving itself from one place to another every week that the shows are operating. Some show people are also very successful in material terms, owning properties in desirable residential areas in addition to well appointed mobile homes, and having the resources to send their children to exclusive independent schools.

In other respects, Gabriel's conceptualisation is helpful in interpreting the references to "home" reported in this paper. Rather than confirming that "all life, experience, and existence is without frontiers or boundaries", some show people's comments suggest that demarcations between "home and school", and between "mobile home" and "residential home", shift in response to the contexts in which they are discussed, and the participants in and the audiences of those discussions. This claim is re-inforced by some of the contradictions, even tensions, evident in some respondents' descriptions of their homes.

Similarly, underlying several references to "home" is a largely - but not entirely - unconscious agreement with the cliché "Home is where the heart is". Many respondents indicated the importance of the strong social networks unifying different families and groups involved in the circuit. These networks were constituted both "on the run" and in the permanent residences inhabited by many show people when the shows were not in progress. This belies any simplified depiction of these people as heartless capitalists obsessed with the acquisition of material wealth.

These two assertions find support in the diverse understandings of "home" delineated in this paper. Many show people talked readily about coming "home" from school to their caravans. On the other hand, most responses to the question, "Where is home for you?"

referred to a particular town, rather than to "my caravan". Some blurring of the "home/school" distinction was also revealed, in that school work (rather than homework) was described as being completed both at the local schools and in the caravans. Rather than suggesting inherent contradictions that require resolution, these varying responses indicate the range of experiences and understandings that make up the particular form of itinerancy in which the show people engage.

IMPLICATIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING GUILD MEMBERS' LIFESTYLES

Elsewhere some of the researchers involved in the project reported here commented thus:

> Members of the Guild are not nomadic, at least in Gabriel's terms, but neither do they conform to the settled residence patterns characteristic of most Australians. The question to be explored in future studies is whether itinerancy may be conceptualised in terms of the degree of structure, with groups such as gipsies and reindeer herders living a relatively loosely transient lifestyle, and other groups such as barge children or Showmen's Guild children living a fairly tightly structured transient lifestyle. Alternatively, issues of itinerant identity might emerge as far more fluid and idiosyncratic than a dichotomy (or even a continuum) suggests. (Danaher, Rose, & Hallinan, 1993, p. 6)

While this is not the place to answer this question definitively, it is appropriate to remark that the evidence presented here inclines the writer to the second of the two alternatives. For one thing, a rigid dichotomy or continuum would not readily accommodate the range of experiences of many of the participants in the study. It would have difficulty in dealing with people's widely varying patterns of involvement in the show circuit. It would be almost impossible for it to reflect the diversity of sometimes apparently contradictory understandings of "home" revealed in interviewees' transcripts.

Finally, the place of schooling (both literally and metaphorically) in the lives and lifestyles of these show people is similarly difficult to delineate definitively. The schooling of children connected with the show takes place in local schools, in caravans, and in boarding schools. Schooling is regarded instrumentally, as a pathway to a career with the Showmen's Guild or in other arenas. At the same time, schooling is prized as an intrinsically worthwhile set of experiences for show children.

CONCLUSION

Just as the "reliable resident/feckless itinerant" dichotomy alluded to at the beginning of this paper has been shown not to refer to people connected with the Showmen's Guild, so an attempt to characterise educational itinerancy as conforming rigidly to a single and simplistic conceptualisation fails to gain credence. Instead, itinerancy - including educational itinerancy - emerges from this discussion as a multi-layered, contextualised, negotiated phenomenon. This might create difficulties for others - such as educational policy makers and the researchers involved in this study - but it does considerably less violence than a more homogeneous depiction to the complexity, diversity, and variety of the lives of the Showmen's Guild of Australasia.

REFERENCES

Danaher, P. A. (1993, September 21). *Marginalised identities, communications technologies, and the politics of research: Issues in interpreting the educational opportunities of the children of the Showmen's Guild of Australasia.*

Danaher, P. A., Rose, C. G., & Hallinan, P. M. (1993, June 30). *Lessons from the carnival: The implications for Australian teacher education of a distance education program designed for the children of the Showmen's Guild of Australasia.* Paper presented at the international conference on teacher education, Tel Aviv, Israel.

Gabriel, T. H. (1990). Thoughts on nomadic aesthetics and the black independent cinema: Traces of a journey. In R. Ferguson, M. Gever, T. T. Minh-Ha, & C. West (Eds.). *Out there: Marginalisation and contemporary cultures* (pp. 395-410). New York, NY and Cambridge, MA: New Museum of Contemporary Art and Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Glaser, B. G. & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research.* Chicago, IL: Aldine.

Rose, C. G. (1993, July 3-9). *Fun and games at the fair: Some lessons for physical education and recreation from a distance education program designed for the children of the Showmen's Guild of Australasia.* Paper presented at the 19th national/international biennial conference of the Australian Council for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation, Darwin.

Rose, C. G., Moriarty, B. J., & Danaher, P. A. (1993, December 8-11). *Margins within margins?: Voices speaking through a study of the provision of an educational program for the children of one Australian show circuit.* Paper submitted for presentation at the "The voices of a margin: Speaking for yourself" conference,

University of Central Queensland, Rockhampton.

Rose, C. G., Wyer, D., & Danaher, P. A. (1993, September 29-October 1). *"Show day all year round": Constructions of meaning through the recreational activities of children in the Showmen's Guild of Australasia.* Paper to be presented at the annual conference of the Australian Anthropological Society, Melbourne.

Rose, P. L. (1990). *Revolutionary antisemitism in Germany from Kant to Wagner.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Rose. P. L. (1992). *Wagner: Race and revolution.* London: Faber and Faber.

Thompson, R., Wyer, D., Kindt, I., & Danaher, P. A. (1993, August 25). *Following the show: Issues relating to the education of the children of the Showmen's Guild of Australasia.* Paper to be presented at the annual forum of the Queensland Institute for Educational Research, Brisbane.

Winning, A. (1990). Homesickness. *Phenomenology and Pedagogy.* 8, 245-256.

Wyer, D., Danaher, P. A., Woodrow, C., Kindt, I., Hallinan, P. M., Moran, P. A., Rose, C. G., Purnell, K. N., Duncum, P., & Thompson, R. (1992, August 26). *Practices and issues in the education of itinerant students: A case study of Showmen's Guild children.* Paper presented at the annual forum of the Queensland Institute for Educational Research, Brisbane.

Wyer, D., Thompson, R., Kindt, I., & Danaher, P. A. (1993, July 1). *"Here today, gone next week": Some lessons for the delivery of itinerant primary schooling of a distance education program designed for the children of the Showmen's Guild of Australasia.* Paper presented at the joint 9th national conference of the Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia and 1st national conference on schooling through distance education, Cairns.